

Unlocking the Word-Hoard

Directions: This Old English passage from *Beowulf* describes how Beowulf kills Grendel's mother with the ancient sword. Examine it closely. Are you able to guess any of the words? Can you point out the characteristics of style of Anglo-Saxon poetry which you have learned?

XXIII Geseah ðā on searwum siege-ēadig bil,
eald sweord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig,
wigena weorð-mynd; þæt [wæs] wāpna cyst,
1560 būton hit wæs mære ðonne ānig mon oðer
tō beadu-lāce aetberan meahte,
gōd ond geatolīc, gīganta geweorc.
Hē gefēng þā fetel-hilt, freca Scyldinga,
hrēoh ond heoro-grim, hring-mæl gebrægd
1565 aldres orwēna, yrringa slōh
þæt hire wið halse heard grāpode
bān-hringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwōd
fāgne flāsc-homan; hēo on flet gecrong,
sweord wæs swätig, secg weorce gefeh.
1570 Līxte se lēoma, lēoht inne stōd,
efne swā of hefene hādre scīneð
rodores candel.

³ *Beowulf*, Howell D. Chickering, Jr., trans. (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 138-140.

Directions: The following are three translations of the same passage. Compare each carefully to determine how faithful each translator has been to the original.

#1 Charles W. Kennedy, 1940

Swift the hero sprang to his feet;
Saw mid the war-gear a stately sword,
An ancient war-brand of biting edge,
Choicest of weapons worthy and strong,
The work of giants, a warrior's joy,
So heavy no hand but his own could hold it
Bear to battle or wield in war.
Then the Schylding warrior, savage and grim,
Seized the ring-hilt and swung the sword,
Struck with fury, despairing of life,
Thrust at the throat, broke through the bone-rings;
The stout blade stabbed through her fated flesh.
She sank in death; the sword was bloody;
The hero joyed in the work of his hand.
The gleaming radiance shimmered and shone
As the candle of heaven shines clear from the sky.⁴

#2 Burton Raffel, 1963

Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy
Sword, hammered by giants, strong
And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons
But so massive that no ordinary man could lift
Its carved and decorated length. He drew it
From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,
And then, savage, now angry
And desperate, lifted it high over his head
And struck with all the strength he had left,
Caught her in the neck and cut it through,
Broke bones and all. Her body fell
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet
With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.
The brilliant light shone, suddenly,
As though burning in that hall, and as bright as Heaven's
Own candle, lit in the sky.⁵

#3 Ruth P. M. Lehmann, 1988

Then he saw a sword, a seige-proved falcion
of ancient ettins with edges tempered,
a guardsman's glory. Though a greater sword
than any other could ably bear,
it was the best of blades for battleplay
featly fashioned, forged by giants.
The champion of Schldyings drew the chain-held sword
furiously and fiercely, freeing it for action.
Of life despairing, he launched a blow
catching her neck with a cruel stroke,
so the bonejoints broke, the blade passed quite through
the fore-doomed body, and she fell dying;
the blade was bloody; the brave one rejoiced.
Then a beam brightened, burning inside,
even as above the earth brilliantly shines
heaven's candle.⁶

⁴ *Beowulf, The Oldest English Epic*, Charles W. Kennedy, trans. (New York, London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940), p. 50-51.

⁵ *Beowulf*, Burton Raffel, trans., (New York: NAL Penguin Inc., 1963), p. 72.

⁶ *Beowulf*, Ruth P. M. Lehmann, trans., (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 54.

Monster Madness



The Return of the Yeti

The 'Proof': A plaster cast shows a yeti footprint—all 20 inches of it.

Yes, yeti. Kin of Big Foot, these hairy, smelly aberrations are called Skunk Apes when lurking in Fort Myers, South Broward, the Everglades and Tavernier. The Sasquatch hulks in the woods of Washington. The Abominable Snowman tracks up Mount Everest. The Bardin Booger haunts Palatka. ¹

Part A. Discuss with your group the following questions.

1. Why do people love stories about monsters?
2. It seems obvious that the *Beowulf* poet's audience believed in the real existence of Grendel and the dragon. Do you believe in the existence of such monsters as Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, the Abominable Snowman?
3. What were some of the real dangers and fears which the Anglo-Saxons had to face? Do you think that the Danes were as successful in defeating them as Beowulf was in defeating the monsters?
4. What dangers and fears do the people of today contend with? How successful have our heroes been in defeating them?
5. Do you think that the love of monster tales may help people symbolically to deal with the evil of the world in which they live?

Part B. Write a narrative in which a modern hero defeats a modern monster.

¹ Geoffrey Tomb, "The Return of the Yeti," *The Miami Herald*, 4 August 1970, 4B.

And the Winner Is . . .

Battle	Grendel	Grendel's mother	Fire dragon
Beowulf's motive			
Opponent's Motive			
Preparation for battle			
Weapons			
Strategy			
Attitude toward battle			
Behavior of thanes			
Outcomes			

30 points

Beowulf Scavenger Hunt

Team

1. Find 2 examples of the following kennings and write down the line number.

open compound kenning

1. _____ line#
2. _____ line#

possessive kenning

1. _____ line#
2. _____ line#

prepositional kenning

1. _____ line#
2. _____ line#

hyphenated kenning

1. _____ line#
2. _____ line#

2. In 5 different sections, find an excellent example of alliteration.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____